

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOLUME 1

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## ASIAN CRANE CONGRESS - 1989

### FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

The Asian Crane Congress will be held during 27 to 29 December 1989 in Saurashtra University, Rajkot, India. Participation is requested from

- Individual crane researchers and conservationists,
- non-governmental organisations,
- post-graduate students and professors potentially interested in field research,
- governmental agencies and officials,
- crane working group members from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan,
- representatives from crane flyway countries, namely, Afghanistan, China, Iran, and U.S.S.R., and
- technical experts with useful information to exchange.

### General goals of the Congress are

- continuation of discussions begun in China and U.S.S.R. about short and long term plans for crane research and conservation in the Asian subcontinent,
- improvement of communication, planning and co-ordination between crane enthusiasts within individual countries,
- development of workable structures for improving international cooperation and on-going information exchange,
- training and information exchange on field research techniques and migration studies (e.g., ground census, trapping, banding and tagging, aerial surveys and satellite tracking), and wetland monitoring, and
- increased understanding of the importance of sociobiological and wetland management issues in crane conservation and exchange of reports and research papers on Common, Demoiselle, Sarus, Siberian and Black-necked Cranes.

### The tentative agenda for the Congress is as follows : 27-XII. 1989

0900-1400	Registration and distribution of research and position papers
1000-1300	Optional field trip to see cranes near Rajkot
1300-1400	Lunch
1415-1430	Formal opening of the Congress
1430-1500	Review of meeting held in China and U.S.S.R.
1500-1600	Summary of current crane conservation efforts and plans
1600-1700	Discussion of research or position papers
1700-1730	Break
1730-1830	Social hour
1830-1930	Banquet
1930-2100	Slide presentation : (1) Cranes, Wetlands, and Conservation in Gujarat (2) Crane Conservation Around the World.

### 28. XII. 1989 Technical Reports and Group Discussion

0900-1045	Sociobiology and wetlands : Management issues
1045-1100	Break
1100-1200	Radio telemetry and Satellite tracking techniques
1200-1230	Crane trapping and banding
1230-1400	Lunch
1400-1800	Field trip - demonstration of crane trapping and banding techniques for crane counting and behavioural studies
1800-1830	Free time
1830-1930	Dinner
1930-2030	Film "A Thousand Cranes"
2030-2130	Informal group meetings.

### 29. XII. 1989

0980-1000	National working group meetings to discuss implications of technical sessions for individual countries and crane species
1000-1100	Plenary session - discussion of needs /opportunities for international cooperation and research on cranes
1100-1115	Break
1115-1230	National meetings - goal setting, including fund raising
1230-1345	Lunch
1345-1530	Plenary session - regional planning
1530-1545	Tea break
1545-1630	To be determined
1630-1800	Conference resolutions
1800-1830	Break
1830-1930	Dinner
1930-2100	Final discussion/closing ceremony

### 30 & 31. XII. 1989 Optional Field Tour

To the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary and Rozi Island, Hingolghadh Educational Sanctuary or Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary.

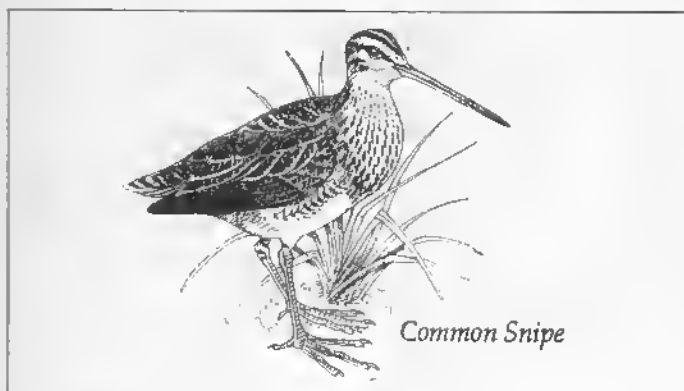
### 30. XII. 1989 to 2, I. 1990 Training in Field Study Techniques (optional)

Registration fee : Indian delegate Rs. 300 : Foreign delegate American Dollar 200

It may be possible to provide expenses for travel and stay to a limited number of delegates.

All those who respond to this announcement will be sent the Second Announcement containing further information about the Congress.

All correspondence should be directed to Professor R.M.Naik, Co-ordinator, Asian Crane Congress-1989, Department of Biosciences, Saurashtra University, RAJKOT-360005, India.



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## EDITORIAL

### 30 Years Old.

In a few month the Newsletter will be thirty years old. What are we going to do about it? Shall we just sit back and allow the third decade to slip by? I wish we could have met at some pleasant sanctuary and renewed old friendships. Short of that, it would be nice to have brief articles from some of you for the first issue of Vol. XXX saying how interesting or how dull you find the Newsletter. I know that

to be honest on such occasions is not easy (knowing how thin-skinned Editors are), but nevertheless I shall look forward to some frank appraisals.

### Checklist of the Birds of Bangalore

S.Subramaniya writes to say that led by Dr. Joseph George, a group in Bangalore intend to produce an annotated checklist of the birds of the area. For doing so they would like to have details of all published and unpublished material on the birds of Bangalore. Subramanya writes ".... the first ever record (known to us) dates back to 1828 that of Bangalore as the type locality for the Blue Bearded Bec-eater (*Merops athertonii*) designated by Jardine and Silby.... This checklist, in addition to giving a list of birds, would focus attention on the changing status of birds, their local nesting seasonality, bird pockets in and around Bangalore, a bibliographic listing of all published literature...."

I am sure our readers will cooperate in this worthwhile project. Dr. Joseph George's address: 189 First Cross Road, Mahalakshmi Layout, Bangalore 560 086.

### Old Articles in a New Cover

Looking over the past issues of the Newsletter, I came across 'Notes from Madras' by R.A. Stewart Melliush, written in March 1965. I am reproducing these because of their inherent worth, but also because Stewart refers to areas which are frequently visited by birders and it would be interesting for them to compare the situation today with what the author saw thirty two years ago. Regarding the commercial salt making on the tidal flats at Point Calimere, I believe that as a result of the report written by Salim Ali, a satisfactory compromise has been arrived at, and Calimere remains "a truly undisturbed wildlife reserve."

### Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*) near Pune

Dr. Satyasheel Naik, 781/82 Shukrawar Peth, Opposite Jain Mandir, Pune 411 002 (Tel: 444362), reports the presence of six Black Storks near Shindovani lake which is 34 kms from Pune on the Sholapur Road. He wonders whether these birds, two adults and four juveniles, have migrated "from Europe, or whether they have bred in the vicinity of this isolated lake". This sighting needs to be followed up, as Black Storks, according to the Handbook, are rare in the Deccan. Dr. Naik reports that the Black Storks "when disturbed would fly and perch on a dried tree adjacent to the lake or would soar up and again land at the same place". There is a good illustration of this stork on plate 8 of the Pictorial Guide.

## Asian Wetland News

A very valuable publication relating to wetlands is AWN, published by Asian Wetland Bureau, Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Unless I am mistaken, it is generously distributed free to persons in Asia connected with wetland conservation. Vol.1, No.2, published in Dec.1988, contains an article on Kolleru Lake by Dr. B.V. Seshagiri Rao, Department of Zoology, DNR College, Bhimavaram 534202, Andhra Pradesh. Of the 160 species of birds recorded in the lake, the Spotbilled Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*) was the one which drew the most attention. During the early 60's "the area was known as the largest pelican breeding centre in the world". In 1972, the area was declared a bird sanctuary "but no pelicans have been seen in the area since 1974." "The surprising fact is that though the pelicans have gone, a large number of other species remain. Is it because being mainly fish eaters pelicans suffer more from the polluted waters than others? There are ten major industries round the lake including a pesticide factory "whose untreated or inadequately treated effluents reach the lake".

## Siberian Cranes on the Brink in India

In one of their Special Articles, the Centre for Environment, Ahmedabad 380 054, says that the number of Siberian Cranes has reached an all time low in India. Only 23 birds were seen in the Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur this year. It is some consolation that these birds continue to be seen in large numbers in the Poyang Lake in South China. It is claimed that the new satellite tracking technology will enable ornithologists to discover the flyways used by these birds from Siberia via Afghanistan to India, and then protection along these staging posts will aid their survival.

## Manmade Reservoirs and Birds

There are hundreds of artificial reservoirs in India which could become exciting bird sanctuaries with imaginative planting of trees and grasses along their borders. The note on the Pong Dam Lake by Sanjeeva Pandey gives an idea of the possibilities of converting barren stretches of water into lively avian habitats.

# NOTES ON THE AVIFAUNA OF SIMLIPAL, ORISSA

KUMAR CHATTOPADHYAY, AJOY HOME, and ANIRUDDHA CHAKRABORTY

Sociological Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203 Barrackpore Trunk Road, Calcutta 700 035.

The Simlipal forest covering about 2700 km<sup>2</sup> more or less occupy the heart of the Mayurbhang District of Orissa. This district, which lies between 22°34' and 21°17' North, and 85°40' and 87°10' East, is located on the north-east of the State.

The Simlipal forest area contains a group of hills rising from about 1000 mt. to 1200 mt. and permeating through 300 km<sup>2</sup> approximately. The peaks are densely wooded and are the progenitors of several waterfalls and tributaries lending beauty to Nature's lovely green easel. The cultivated fields in between the hills encourage formation of suitable niches for certain species of birds.

A list of the birds seen is given below:

### Family

<i>Accipitridae</i>	Shikra, Honey Buzzard, Shikra Falcon.
<i>Alcedinidae</i>	Whitebreasted Kingfisher.
<i>Bucerotidae</i>	Malabar Pied Hornbill.

<i>Campephagidae</i>	Scarlet Minivet, Small Minivet, Wood Shrike, Common Shrike, Blackbacked Pied Flycatcher-Shrike.
<i>Capitonidae</i>	Green Barbet, Crimson-breasted Barbet, Blue-throated Barbet, Lineated Barbet.
<i>Caprimulgidae</i>	Longtailed Nightjar, Jungle Nightjar.
<i>Ciconiidae</i>	Openbilled Stork, Whitenecked Stork.
<i>Columbidae</i>	Green Pigeon, Emerald Dove, Spotted Dove.
<i>Coraciidae</i>	Indian Roller.
<i>Corvidae</i>	Tree Pie, Jungle Crow.
<i>Cuculidae</i>	Indian Cuckoo, Indian Koel, Hawk-Cuckoo.
<i>Dicaeidae</i>	Tickell's Flowerpecker, Thickbilled Flower Pecker.
<i>Dicruridae</i>	Racket-tailed Drongo, Grey Drongo, Bronzed Drongo, Black Drongo, Whitebellied Drongo.

<i>Fringillidae</i>	Indian Rosefinch.	<i>Sittidae</i>	Chestnutbellied Nuthatch, Velvetfronted Nuthatch.
<i>Galliformes</i>	Red Junglefowl, Painted Spurrowl.	<i>Sturnidae</i>	Greyheaded Myna, Jungle Myna, Hill Myna.
<i>Irenidae</i>	Goldfronted Chloropsis, Jerdon's Chloropsis, Fairy Bluebird, Indian Iora.	<i>Strigidae</i>	Scops Owl, Brown Hawk Owl, Spotted Owlet.
<i>Charadriidae</i>	Redwattled Lapwing.	<i>Sylviinae</i>	Greenish Willow Warbler, Ashy Wren-Warbler, Jungle Wren-Warbler, Rufous Wren-Warbler, Willow Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Tailor Bird.
<i>Laniidae</i>	Rufousbacked Shrike.	<i>Turdinae</i>	Shama, Indian Robin, Magpie-Robin, Smallbilled Mountain Thrush, Tickell's Thrush.
<i>Meropidae</i>	Bluebearded Bee-eater, Common Bee-eater.	<i>Timaliinae</i>	Redheaded Babbler, Spotted Babbler, Jungle Babbler.
<i>Motacillidae</i>	Tree Pipit, Paddyfield Pipit, White Wagtail, Grey Wagtail.	<i>Trogonidae</i>	Central Indian Trogon.
<i>Muscicapidae</i>	Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher, Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher, Greyheaded Flycatcher, Blacknaped Monarch Flycatcher, Whitetailed Bushchat.	<i>Upupidae</i>	Hoopoe.
<i>Nectariniidae</i>	Purple Sunbird, Yellowbacked Sunbird.	<i>Zosteropidae</i>	White-eye.
<i>Oriolidae</i>	Blackheaded Oriole.		
<i>Paridae</i>	Grey Tit, Yellowcheeked Tit.		
<i>Phasianidae</i>	Peafowl.		
<i>Picidae</i>	Large Yellownaped Woodpecker, Small Yellownaped Woodpecker, Large Goldenbacked Woodpecker, Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker, Pigmy Woodpecker.		
<i>Picnonotidae</i>	Redwhiskered Bulbul, Blackcrested Yellow Bulbul.		
<i>Ploidae</i>	Spotted Munia.		
<i>Psittacidae</i>	Blossomheaded Parakeet, Roseringed Parakeet, Large Parakeet.		

An analysis of the data shows the spatial concentration or density of bird species to be about 0.083 per km<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, we have been able to identify 7 ecosystems in the area, and each such "ecosystemic zone" worked out to cover about 386 km<sup>2</sup> on an average. So it becomes obvious from the analysed data provided by the researchers that the spatial distribution of bird species in this forest is of a skewed nature. In other words, bird species are not evenly distributed but are possibly associated with certain specific pockets of the forest. This again indicates the importance of "place" and "location" of the birds watched for further study and/or confirmation of the observed species.

## THE PONG DAM LAKE BIRD SANCTUARY, HIMACHAL PRADESH

SANJEEVA PANDEY, DFO Wildlife, Sarahan Bushahr 172 102 (Distt. Shimla) H.P.

The Pong Dam Lake is the result of a big dam on the river Beas in the Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh. The construction took place in 1960. The huge lake, since its inception is playing host to thousands of waterfowl during winter months, each year.

My birding jaunts to this lake were rewarded with the sightings of 15 Rednecked Grebe, (*Podiceps griseigena*) on 21st February, and about a hundred Bar-headed Geese on 7th March 1989. The majority of waterfowl were Pintails, followed by Mallards, Coots, White-eyed Pochards, Tufted Ducks, Red Crested Pochards, Shovellers, Wigeons and

Spotbills. I could see Eurasian Lapwing, Spurwinged Lapwings, Redwattled Lapwing, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Large Stone Plover, Common Redshanks, Greenshanks, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpipers and Temmink's Stints on the shores of the lake. Great Blackheaded Gulls, Blackheaded Gulls and River Terns were seen in their hundreds. My birding on this lake indicate occurrence of Painted Storks, Black Storks, Grey Herons, Large Cattle Egret and Sarus Cranes. During my recent visit I could observe Small Indian Pratincoles and Stone Curlews on the sandy banks covered with small pebbles.

A boat ride to Ransar and Karu islands of the Pong Dam Lake resulted in sighting of Starlings, Brahminy Myna, Bank Myna, Crested Lark, Sand Larks, White Wagtails, Pied Wagtails, Pipits and Grey Partridges. The draw-down areas on these islands as well as the shores have a large number of mud flats, mudspits and shallow areas. The availability of food being high in these areas, they attract waders and waterfowl alike.

In the spillway area of the Dam, there are a large number of swamps with a lot of reeds and tall grasses. I saw Purple Heron, Purple Moorhen, Indian Moorhen, Little Egret, Large Egret, Cormorants, Grey Herons, Red Munias, Spotted Munias, White Throated Munias, Collared Bush Chats, Dark Grey Bush Chats, Striated Babblers and Great Indian Reed Warblers in these marshes. A Marsh Harrier in this area is a common sight. The Pallas's Fishing Eagle and Brahminy Kite could be seen in the nearby waterspreads. The scavengers were represented by Scavenger Vulture, Whitebacked Vulture and King Vulture.

My bird list made over five years of birding in this area indicate more than 220 bird species, though there is such overlap between bird habitats some tentative demarcations for the Pong Dam Lake are attempted here.

*Open water for swimming and fishing:* Cormorants, Darters, Grebes, Blackheaded and Great Blackheaded Gulls, Ospreys and Rednecked Grebes.

*Marsh:* Dabchicks, Moorhens, Coots, Lapwings, Marsh Harrier, Crow-Pheasant, Sandpipers, Redshanks, Stints.

*Mud Banks and Mudspits:* Ducks, Plovers, Wagtails, Pipits and Larks.

*The Rocky Areas:* Wall Creeper, Thrushes, Chats, Babblers.

*Sand Banks:* Small Indian Pratincole, Stone Curlew.

*Shrubs and Trees:* Bush Chats, Bulbuls, Warblers, Robins. As the shrubs give way to forest, bird species also change. Among the trees there are Tits, Woodpeckers, Barbets, Tree Pies, Orioles and others.

A list of the flora which provides food and shelter to the birds is given here, for obviously this vegetation plays a key role in attracting the birds.

### Vegetation of Great Attraction to the Birds

*Trees:* Bombax spp., Bottle Brush (*Callistemon viminalis*), Ficus spp., Mango (*Mangifera indica*), Jamun (*Syzygium cumini*), *Casearia tomentosa*, *Dalbergia sissoo*, *Acacia* spp., *Sapindus* spp., *Bauhinia variegate*, *Terminalia* spp., *Emblia officinalis*, *Albizia* spp., *Pyrus pashia*, *Prunus* spp., *Melia azadirach*.

*Bushes:* *Carissa Opaca*, *Murraya koenigii*, *Ziziphus* spp., *Juvenile plantation areas*, *Agave* spp. (Inflorescence).

*Grasses:* *Saccharum munja*, *Dendrocalamus* spp., *Cynodon dactylon*, *Cymbopogon* spp., *Arundinaria* spp.

*Climbers:* *Bauhinia* spp., *Loranthus* spp.

In addition to the various kinds of habitats available in and around the lake, there are two special locality factors, the importance of which from the avian viewpoint should not be overlooked. The Pong Dam Lake is located in the foothills of the Himalayas and has the mighty Dhauladhar as its background. The diverse habitats available at the lake provide shelter to a large number of altitudinal migrants which descend down into the valley to escape the severe winter conditions. Secondly, the Lake's situation in the extreme north west of lowland India, makes it very suitable for intercepting migrants entering the plains from the northwest. As such, the Pong Dam Lake areas receive the international migrants, altitudinal migrants and local migrants. From the month of October, huge flocks may be seen flying over the lake looking for suitable places to settle down. Most of the duck such as Common Teal, Mallard, Gadwall and Pintail, prefer a vegetarian diet. They look for weeds, tender shoots of marsh plants and grains. The Ruddy Sheldrake or Brahminy Duck feed on vegetable matter as well as insects, molluscs and fish. All these ducks are mainly surface feeders and prefer the shallow banks of the lake. The tufted Pochards, the Little Grebes and Cormorants are some of the water birds which dive into the lake for feeding.

Dr. Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley in their celebrated work 'Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan', mention that the total number of bird families found in India are 79. Against this, the diverse environs of the Pong Dam Lake offer shelter to more than 220 bird species belonging to 54 bird families. This number indicates the genetic diversity of the sanctuary.



## NOTES FROM MADRAS

R.A. STEWART MELLUISH

The birdwatcher who visits the city of Madras in winter will not regret spending an hour or two at the sanctuary of Vedanthangal. But he should arrange to stay long enough to go further afield, and not rest content with what is little more than armchair watching: for though the birds there are entirely free, and there is probably nowhere else locally where the larger waterbirds like spoonbill and ibis can be seen at their nests so conveniently, Vedanthangal is not unlike a zoo, and if any more municipal cannas and carpark notices are planted and garden seats and observation towers erected many birdwatchers will be driven away. There are plenty of other interesting places to visit, and those who prefer birdwatching when it involves some physical effort can exercise themselves well. The mudflats to the west of Point Calimere, for example -- mile upon mile of glutinous ooze -- are a severe challenge to any enthusiast's stamina.

Calimere is, ornithologically, of the first quality. It was described briefly by Salim Ali in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (Vol.60, No.2) after a visit there in November 1962 to find out whether it would make a suitable site for a shore-birds sanctuary. Whatever may have come of this proposal, it is clear that commercial interest in the making of salt on the tidal flats will have to be overcome before a truly undisturbed wild-life reserve can be created -- at least, one of any size -- and it is the salt industry that is the greatest threat, at present, to the remoteness and secluded beauty of the marsh: for to make salt nowadays you need electricity to drive pumps, roads for tractors, and a mass of labourers, all enemies of reactionary birdwatchers if not the birds.

Point Calimere is in Tanjore district, where the Coromandel Coast stops running due south and turns abruptly west to form the northern fringe of the Palk Strait between India and Ceylon. My map is not drawn to scale (I had to make it myself), but it would seem that from about three miles to twenty miles west of the point the shore is merely a thin strip of sand, occasionally broken by the mouths of creeks, dividing the strait from a huge zone of mud, expanses of shallow, brackish water, and islets. If you go by motor, as I did on my first visit, you drive to Vedaranniyam from the nearest town in the hinterland, which is Tiruturaipoondi, and thence across the eastern edge of the flats to Kodikkarai on the coast. Kodikkarai is one of those melancholy, silent ends of the world where men give up and the sea and sky take over. The road peters

out with a notice announcing, with laconic finality, 'End'. The South Indian Railway built a line from Tiruturaipoondi to Kodikkarai, however, so if you like trains you can travel overnight from Egmore in Madras and arrive in time to breakfast on the shore. The last stage of the journey, in the dawning light; when you sense the nearness of the sea, is immensely refreshing and stimulating.

The moment you leave Vedaranniyam you are amongst the birds. In winter, at least, and according to the foresters all the year round, the western horizon over what they call the swamp is fringed with a pink line of flamingoes. This is not one of the world's great flamingo feeding-grounds: the numbers are relatively few -- from the most realistic accounts, not more than five thousand *roseus* in winter -- but it is probably the best Southern India can offer. The numbers at Pulicat are not, as far as I know, ever as great as this. If any reader knows of similar or larger concentrations of these birds in the South, I hope he will publish the fact, because the seasonal movements and habits of this species away from their known breeding grounds in India seem to have been little documented, in spite of its conspicuous and interesting appearance.

If you are new to flamingoes, you set off after them on foot and begin your day-long plod through the mud and water. Flamingoes feet are a better shape than yours, though, for mud, and they can walk faster than you can, so once they realise you are anxious to watch them or photograph them, and not simply catch shrimps like a local fisherman, they wander nonchalantly away. They seem to prefer to taunt you in this way rather than take to their wings, and so, perhaps, give you the opportunity you may be seeking to admire them, in flight. But the effort of tramping through the mud, slow though the progress is, and however foolish the flamingoes make you feel, is well worth while; indeed, it is essential if you are to see much else, because although you can engage a local boat it will hinder as much as help you, and anyway it can only go where there's water.

If you do wade out, and there is mud and water in the right quantities and the time of year is satisfactory, you will see a great deal. Salim Ali, in 1962, undertook a trial catch of waders with a local fowler's device consisting of a row of nooses, 'strung out at random along the mudflats', and so in a very short time collected, of the *Charadriidae*, lesser sand plover, redshank, marsh sandpiper, wood sandpiper,

little stint, Kentish plover, ruff, and a single rednecked phalarope. Of these only the last can be regarded as unusual, though I would not call ruff a common winter visitor to these coasts either. The other species caught are to be seen at any suitable spot in Madras at the right time of year, but not in such huge numbers as at Calimere. If the visitor there is lucky in his timing, he will find the mud on the landward side of the shore one scurrying, fidgeting, chittering, fluttering mass of small waders, frenziedly poking about in the slime in their hunt for food. He will see terek sandpipers in sizeable flocks of fifty or more, quantities of little ringed plover and greenshank; also stilt, curlew-sandpiper, large sand plover and turnstone. He may even spot, among the stints, a group of larger chubbier birds with downcurved beaks which, when flushed, do not show the tell-tale white upper tail coverts of the curlew-sandpiper: these are probably dunlin. I saw four of these birds at Calimere on 12 January 1964, but I have not been able to confirm the record yet; they are not, evidently, one of the common wintering birds that reach the south regularly. And who knows how many Temminck's, broadbilled and longtoed stints, sanderlings and other such tiny snippets pass the field observer by unnoticed in the mass of confused movement and hasty flight?

The larger, more sedate birds are there too: rows of plump golden plover stand in the shallows, all facing the wind; a bartailed godwit probes about in the banks of a creek; whimbrels hasten overhead whistling their seven whistles; a party of grey and white plover, *squatarola*, beat upwind with a neat and precise motion of their wings, their black axillaries rhythmically flashing; a curlew calls, and a number rise languidly from their feeding, disturbed, perhaps by the impetuous fighting of nervous stints and plover zigzagging between them. These, together with the usual egrets, herons and storks, and the terns, which fill the air with their squawks and buoyant flight (mostly Caspian, whiskered, gullbilled and lesser crested) make up the bulk of the great, seemingly limitless, concentration of birds which, in winter, dominate the mud.

Engrossed in all this, the birdwatcher may well neglect the shore itself. For if he turns away from the mud and all the activity and looks towards the strait, the world is immediately empty -- except for some dauntless butterfly fluttering off towards Ceylon an inch or two above the waves, or a brownheaded gull. The transformation is astonishing. The sea, for all its fidgeting waves and the shimmering facets of its surface, is relatively lifeless, and its shore vacant. It is curious how dull tropical shores can be, and how fruitless a watch on one so often proves. If one

sits on the edge of the Baltic, or spends an afternoon on a headland in Norfolk, and scans the waves, something or other is sure to turn up. Geese will fly purposefully along the coast, a fulmar will wheel over the crests of distant waves, a raft of scoter or merganser will appear, or some diver-like blob will attract one's attention a mile or more out to sea, unidentifiable, baffling, but hypnotic and fascinating for hours. This just doesn't seem to happen on the southern coasts of India; at least, all my shore watcher on the Madras coast have been most disappointing.

To dismiss the shore, though, is a mistake. There is little doubt that the Palk Strait off Calimere offers a lot of excitement in the months when the migrations are on, for Ceylon entertains many visitors from the centre of Asia, and many if not the majority of these must cross the strait. An expedition to Calimere in September or October ought to be most rewarding, and give a new dimension to one's view of the sea and its shores. And the birdwatcher who goes there after the main movements are over, as I have done, should remember that apart from the conspicuous oyster-catcher there is at least one remarkable shore-dwelling bird which is unlikely to be noticed at all unless one deliberately and diligently examines the tideline: the improbable crab plover. This extraordinary bird -- so odd that it is classified in a family of its own, *Dromadidae*, all by itself -- is thoroughly at home on the remote undisturbed beaches west of the point, and there would seem to be little reason why it should not burrow its quaint tunnels in the sand there, and breed its solitary young. Ripley says it breeds off Ceylon at Adam's Bridge, but does not mention its nesting in India, so I suppose nothing is known about its movements and possible or actual breeding localities here. I spent one afternoon last November watching a party of seven at Calimere. They didn't do anything much, except wash and preen themselves, and then prospect a little along the water's edge. But their heavy bills and pied plumage and generally singular appearance enthralled me, and I sat on the sand and watched them through a telescope for the best part of two hours, and was only roused from my reverie by what seemed to me an abrupt and ill-considered decision of the tide to rise and set me awash. No other birds seem so completely in tune as these with the atmosphere of remote, uncoupled seclusion which prevails over faraway and almost inaccessible shores and the sight of them, justifies any number of barren days spent on empty coasts.

March 1965.



**YELLOWTHROATED BULBULS AND BLACKBACKED WOODPECKERS, – K. PRAVEEN KARANTH, 20 II Cross, Vinayaka Nagar, Hospital Extension, Hebbal, Bangalore 560 024.**

On July 10, 1988 I went bird watching with Mr Papanna, to Savandurga which is about 50 km south-west of Bangalore. Here in the dry deciduous forest of Savandurga early in the morning at about 7.30 we saw a bulbul sized bird with a bright conspicuous yellow head (throat, cheek, crown), brown back and wings and yellow under the tail. The upper portions of the tail were rusty brown and the tail tips were paler. The bird was about 13 ft. away from us on a branch 7 ft. from the ground on a thorny bush. It was preening itself and was least concerned at our presence. Later at home I identified the bird as Yellowthroated Bulbul, (*Pycnonotus xantholaemus*), after referring to pictorial guide to Birds of Indian Sub-continent and compact Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan. The field characters were very similar to that given in the book, but the illustration in the pictorial guide showed only the throat yellow, but this particular specimen had its whole head yellow.

We made yet another rare sighting of three Blackbacked Woodpeckers in the same area on that day. We spotted them at the bottom of the hillock on a cactus plant.

Once again we were able to see Blackbacked Woodpeckers on a road side banyan tree near Thippagondanahalli dam on August 21, 1988. On this occasion, Sridhar and Govindraj were also with us and Sridhar identified one of them having the yellow crest as a female. This spot is not far from Savandurga and they were again three in number. With these observations I feel that these birds are locally migratory.

On yet another occasion we came across a lone Blackbacked Woodpecker near Byadarahalli village which is about 10 km from Bangalore city along Magadi road. On this occasion we were not lucky enough as we could not see the bird's back. We first heard the call which was very distinct and was surely not the call of a Goldenbacked Woodpecker. I ran to see the bird, but I could not observe it properly as it flew through a bamboo clump. Though at first I had my own doubts we heard its all once again which was loud and clear. Sridhar and I concluded that it was the call of a Blackbacked Woodpecker.

**LAPWINGS ON A ROOF, – M.S. KOSHY, Det. T.G. No.16, C.V.D., Delhi 110 110.**

A pair of Red wattled Lapwings made a nest on the roof of a 50 feet two storey building in Delhi Cantt. The spacious

roof has side walls at a height of two feet. They built the nest on the leftover of some concrete materials lying on the roof. The three eggs were hatched on 17th June. For the first one and a half days the chicks were almost in the nest. The male and female used to bring water on their belly in the 40°C heat. The second day they started to move to the other part of the roof and finally spent their time in a corner where the branches of tall trees cover the roof. Underneath the tree cover there lies a lot of dry leaves and mud which probably gave the chicks much ants and insects to eat.

On 20th June, the parents along with the chicks vanished from the roof and were seen on the ground.

**COMMENTS ON THE NEWSLETTER, – T.V. JOSE, 8 Reena Apartments, Chincholi Bunder Road, Malad (W), Bombay 400 064**

This has reference to the Editorial of Nov-Dec 1988 issue of Newsletter

1. It will be of help in our pursuit of knowledge if the readers of the Newsletters care to write to the editor regarding their ignorance as well. If we do not know that we do not know, we will not be able to know what we are otherwise able to know. An ignorant reader may be able to locate an area of thought which others have not been hitherto able to locate. I am afraid that this aspect of knowing things has not been given its due importance. If the Editor himself does not know the answer to the query posed by the reader, it should not be the cause for the Editor not to put it in Newsletter. There may be some among the readers able to enlighten others writing to the Editor.

2. With regard to the note on *Reproductive Strategies in Waterfowl*, in the November-December 1988 issue, according to my observation the number of eggs a clutch contains is definitely not just based on the size of birds. It is, on the other hand, based on the protection afforded to the number of eggs in the overall survival mechanism of a particular species. Let us remember that there are other means complementary to reproductive ability of a species in its efforts to survive. Size and strength of the individuals of a particular species may prove to be helpful in their attempts to survive and to that extent that species has not to lean on its reproductive ability alone for its survival. A similar species may be more pugnacious (for example, predatory animals are not remarkable for their size.) or more intelligent or with greater ability in mimicry and colours with greater observations. Each in its own way helps the individual species to protect itself from the hostile environment that it inhabits. If the number of eggs are limited, we can be reasonably sure that there are other

effective ways to make good this deficiency. Conversely, if a species is profuse in its reproduction, we can be equally sure that that species is poor in other abilities to protect itself from being wiped out of existence. Let us extend our reasoning to mammals.

Mammals are higher animals in the evolutionary process and they have been able to economise their expenditure and to increase their abilities to procure the required energy for the purpose of survival. They do not lay eggs, but produce their young alive, reducing thus the comparatively wasteful method of laying eggs. We notice that their reproduction is much less. They are more secure in other ways also. On the other hand, we find that lower

animals like fish, insects, etc. are not so well equipped to protect themselves or their offspring, and they produce far larger number of eggs. Their young do not get parental care at all or not so much as in the case of birds and mammals.

Reproduction depends on availability of food, no doubt. Availability of food and reproductive ability of the species are the warp and weft of existence. I shall write about the role food plays in the survival of species, in future, not now. Meantime I shall pose a question to the readers: Why do domestic fowl lay so many eggs? Is it because it has so many enemies? Or it has so much food to eat? Or some other possible reason?

## NEWS FROM ABROAD

### REDISCOVERIES

Frank Lambert, who wrote the Biodiversity column in the last *World Birdwatch*, took a short holiday in Colombia early in 1989 before returning to study birds in Borneo for two years. With *Birds to watch* in his knapsack, he dutifully reported on all the threatened species he encountered in Colombia, the most important of which was the **Banded Ground-cuckoo** *Neomorphus radiolosus*. A single bird was seen at close range for several minutes in a small patch of moss-forest at 600 m near Alto Anchicayá. Lambert was able to tape its continuous "tak" call, which sounded like (but was not) bill-snapping, and assumed this was an alarm call (possibly a nest or young was close by). All the evidence gathered for *Threatened birds of the Americas* suggests that no modern ornithologist has seen this Colombia/Ecuador endemic, the last specimen having been collected in 1955. Lambert reports plenty of primary habitat remaining in the region and assumes the species is not so much rare as overlooked.



### THREATENED BIRDS ON ASIAN ISLANDS

Jesper Hornskov recently reported to ICBP some important new observations on threatened birds in Asia. In early 1989 he was on Hainan Island, China, and found the little-known **White-eared Hill-partridge** *Arborophila ardens* relatively common and comparatively safe (several forest reserves exist on the island). He confirms the presence of the **Waterfall Swift** *Hydrochous gigas* in Borneo (four noted on Mt Kinabalu in April 1986). From the Philippines, where he and Stig Jensen have spent many months in recent years, the important news is all bad: he agrees with the general view that the **Red-vented Cockatoo** *Cacatua haematuropygia* is "in extreme danger of extinction" (see *World Birdwatch* 11,1: 5) and reports that the **Whiskered Pitta** *Pitta kochi*, endemic to the oak-clad mountains of northern Luzon and not seen for many years, is known to veteran loggers of the region who consider it a lowland/foothill specialist: "if so, it could well become extinct very soon".

### THE OTHER PRICE OF OIL

The past six months have seen disastrous oil spills in Antarctica, the Arabian Gulf and Alaska. Birds will have been big losers in all three, but the last case — the Exxon Valdez calamity in Prince William Sound — must surely be the worst. Ironically Stan Senner, Chairman of ICBP-USA, wrote his thesis on migrant shorebirds in the Copper River Delta (a few miles east of the affected areas) with federal agency funding to assess the likely environmental damage in case of a spill.

### OKINAWA'S FORESTS STILL GOING

Despite repeated expressions of concern from various conservation interests, including ICBP which supported a campaign run by the Wild Bird Society of Japan (see *World Birdwatch* 9,1: 6-7), the authorities in Japan are failing to halt the gradual clearance of Yambaru, the forested northern section of Okinawa and the only place on earth for the **Okinawa Rail** *Rallus okinawae* and Okinawa (or Pryer's) Woodpecker *Sapheopipo noguchii*. The Asian Continental Section meeting in Thailand (see p.6) learnt that many lower areas of forest are still under attack (priceless, unique habitat going to make cartons!) and that the U.S.A. is seeking to build a VTOL pad in one section of the forest. Appropriate interventions are being made.



Okinawa Woodpecker (Photo: T. Hanashiro)

Courtesy:  
WORLD BIRDWATCH

## BOOK REVIEWS

### MORE ON HURRICANE GILBERT

by Peter R. Bacon

Dire predictions of catastrophic damage to bird populations in Jamaica as a result of Hurricane Gilbert (*World Birdwatch* 10,3: 1-2) were not accepted by some sections of the avifauna. It appears to have been business as usual over the last few months for most of the seabirds and waterfowl.

When Hurricane Gilbert struck on 12 September 1988, beaches and coastal wetland areas were severely damaged, and mangroves used for roosting and nesting by various species suffered severe defoliation and upper branch breakage. In some areas up to 60% of the trees were lost. Nests were destroyed in the pelican colony near Port Royal, but within three weeks the birds were incubating a new batch of eggs, some in a new nest site a short distance down the coast, whilst others had returned to the old site. The main result of disruption by the storm seems to be that the colony is now spread over a wider area of the Port Royal mangroves; by March 1989 there was a good crop of chicks already in evidence.

On the north coast at Pear Tree Bottom, a roost used heavily by herons was devastated by the storm, but the birds continued to roost there in the same numbers, although crowded together more closely. Similar site tenacity has been noted for two other hurricane-damaged north-coast mangrove roosts used by herons at Falmouth and Saltmarsh.

Storm surge-flooding, vegetation damage and deposition of coral rubble, seagrass- and tree-debris in coastal wetlands at various localities along the north coast of Jamaica do not appear to have affected numbers of waders. Counts made over the past four months compare favourably with those made previously at similar periods of the year, and small flocks of dowitchers, Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* and other migrants were present as usual.

Despite the severity of Hurricane Gilbert and the extensive damage, coastal ecosystems are recovering very rapidly and pre-storm conditions have been reestablished in most seabird and waterfowl feeding habitats already. Hurricane effects on population numbers are expected to be minor and some behavioural adjustments are all that appear to have been required from the waterbirds.

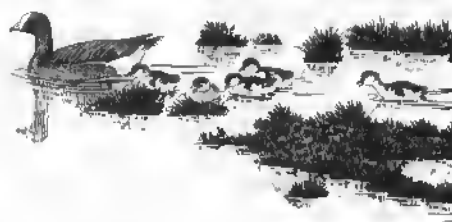
Peter Bacon is at the Zoology Department of the University of the West Indies.

For further information on the following books, or for purchase, contact a well-known bookshop, natural history book supplier or the relevant publisher. Availability details are given for a few of the more difficult-to-obtain titles.

**Birds of the western Palearctic**, Vol. 5, edited by S. Cramp. Oxford University Press, 1988. 1,063 pp. £75 (hb). Each volume of BWP gets a little more breasting-taking. This one treats 115 species (almost nine pages per species), comprising 21 larks, seven hirundines, 16 motacillids, four bulbuls, five accentors and 55 chats and thrushes, plus Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*, Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*, Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*, Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and three New World vagrants. Paintings and text are equally triumphant.

**Waders of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East** by P. Colston and P. Burton. Hodder and Stoughton, 1988. 224 pp. £8.95 (hb). An indispensable field guide for birdwatchers. All breeding waders of the area are described and illustrated, as well as all regular visitors and the odd rarity, amounting to 87 out of the world's 214 species. Short accounts of the birds' life-histories have also been included.

**Collins guide to the birds of prey of Britain and Europe, North Africa and the Middle East** by B. Gænsbøl. Collins, 1987. 384 pp. £14.95 (hb). A highly comprehensive handbook covering the 46 breeding species of the area, five of which are globally threatened (Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucorhynchus*, White-tailed Eagle *H. albicilla*, Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*), and many more of which are regionally threatened. Illustrated with photographs, distribution maps, migration charts and silhouette drawings.



Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*.

**Wildfowl: an identification guide to the ducks, geese and swans of the world** by S. Madge and H. Burn. Christopher Helm, 1988. 298 pp. £19.95 (hb). A concise review of wildfowl. Plates are complemented by an informative caption page with colour distribution maps.

**Ospreys: a natural and unnatural history** by A. Poore. Cambridge University Press, 1989. 246 pp. £17.50 (hb). The Osprey is one of the world's best known birds of prey, and is especially familiar to members of ICBP (at least in symbolic form). This book is a clear, entertaining and up-to-date compilation of the natural history and status of the species. Special attention is devoted to the successful restoration of threatened Osprey populations in Scotland and New England.

**Weisstorchzug** by H. Schulz. Verlag J. Margraf, Weikersheim, FRG, 1989. 459 pp. DM39 (pb). The detailed results of a project jointly undertaken by ICBP and WWF-West Germany to investigate the ecology, threats and conservation of the White Stork during migration in Africa and the Near East. This on-going project has provided useful information for inclusion in a species management plan under the Bonn Convention on migratory animals.

**The life of birds** by J. Welty and L. Baptista. 4th edition. Saunders College Publishing, 1988. 698 pp. £24 (hb). The aim of this book is to present, simply and straightforwardly, the basic facts of bird biology, and to arouse in the reader a lasting fascination for birds. This fourth edition (first published in 1962) is testimony to the success of this task. The authors liken the scientific discipline of ornithology to a tree with new branches continuously growing, and have updated their information in successive editions. Sadly, the data on extinct and endangered birds are already out-of-date, not a reflection on the book but on the pace of detrimental change.

**Effects of atmospheric pollutants on forests, wetlands and agricultural ecosystems** edited by T. Hutchinson and K. Meema. Springer-Verlag, 1987. 652 pp. DM274 (hb). Serious problems of forest dieback and environmental degradation have appeared in Europe and in eastern North America, with air pollutants involved in many of the declines. The magnitude of the problem merits great concern and the complex interactions require interdisciplinary approaches. These proceedings (of the NATO Advanced Research Workshop held in Toronto, Canada, 12-17 May 1985) address the issues.

**Analytical biogeography** edited by A. Myers and P. Giller. Chapman and Hall, 1988. 578 pp. £49.50 (hb). Biogeography is the study of the geographical distributions of animals and plants around the world, and the complex processes which have led to the development of these distributions. A wide range of scientific disciplines are involved in this research, including geography and palaeontology as well as biology.

and the results will be useful in evaluating how the present destruction of natural habitats could diminish biological diversity and disrupt the processes of evolution.

**The birdwatcher's yearbook and diary 1989** edited by J. Pemberton. Buckingham Press, 1988. 320 pp. £8.75 (pb). Ordered direct from publisher, 25 Manor Park, Maids Moreton, Bucks, enclosing payment. A comprehensive pocket book packed with up-to-date, local, national and international information for the British birdwatcher. For the first time incorporates a Log Chart covering 596 species and allowing space for unusual additions. A valuable and interesting reference book for birdwatchers.

**Biographies for birdwatchers** by B. and R. Mearns. Academic Press, 1988. 490 pp. £17.50 (hb). A fascinating account of the history of the naming of birds, well researched and illustrated. Many of the early naturalists were great travellers and the 89 individuals (e.g. Lady Amherst, Thomas Bewick, Eleonora of Arborea, Peter Simon Pallas) in this book between them explored almost every corner of the world. Their adventures took place largely in the mid-19th century and give the reader a vivid idea of the development of ornithology. This book shows the enormous lengths to which these intrepid bird explorers went in order to find and identify species previously unknown. Highly recommended for those long wet days beside the fire when fieldtrips are impossible.

**Guide to birds of the Falkland Islands** by R. Woods. Anthony Nelson, 1988. 256 pp. £14.95 (hb). This guide covers all 185 species recorded in the Falklands or within 200 miles around the islands. Colour plates complement the text, and an introduction describes the environment and records the history of ornithological and conservation activity.

**Birds of Iceland** by R. Bardarson. H. R. Bardarson, 1986. 336 pp. £37 (hb). Available from Booksellers Import Association, Skutuvogur 12C, 104 Reykjavik, Iceland. A sumptuously illustrated book with around 500 photographs and details of all the breeding birds of Iceland – about 70 in all – as well as many of the regular visitors. Information too on some of the most interesting places in the country for birdwatching.

**A new, expanded guide to the birds of Alaska** by R. Armstrong. Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1988. 322 pp. £16.95 (pb). This comprehensive guide covers all the species of bird known to have occurred in Alaska up to 1 February 1983. Photo-

**The Arctic and its wildlife** by B. Sage. Croom Helm, 1986. 190 pp. £14.95 (hb). The climate, landscape, flora and fauna of the Arctic are more diverse than is commonly supposed. This book is an interesting study of the ecology of this region, bridging the gap between the few available general books and the enormous amount of technical literature. A chapter on the breeding birds of the area is included.

**Birds of the Antarctic** edited by B. Roberts. Blandford Press, 1987 (first published 1967). 191 pp. £19.95 (hb). **Antarctica: no single country, no single sea** by P. Johnson et al. New Holland, 1988. 176 pp. £10.95 (hb). Until recently there have been few popular books on Antarctica. However, a growing recognition of the scientific, ecological and economic importance of the region has led to a flurry of publications. The first book listed here is a collection of more than 300 paintings and drawings by Edward Wilson, a member of Scott's Antarctic expeditions, and represents the first illustrations of the majority of the birds in their natural habitats. The second book provides a more contemporary look at Antarctica, and with over 100 colour photographs presents a strong visual image of a beautiful and yet vulnerable continent.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

The following books have also been received. Very warm thanks go to the publishers for their generosity.

**Birdwatching in Britain** by N. Redman and S. Harrap. Christopher Helm, 1987. 288 pp. £12.95 (hb). **Go birding** by T. Soper. BBC Books, 1988. 182 pp. £4.95 (pb). **Birds of Islay** by R. Elliott. Christopher Helm, 1989. 216 pp. £11.95 (pb). **Wildfowl in Great Britain** by M. Owen et al. 2nd edition. Cambridge University Press, 1986. 613 pp. £35 (hb). **The birds of the Pentland Hills** by I. Munro. Scottish Academic Press, 1988. 208 pp. £9.50 (hb), £4.95 (pb). **Seabirds in the North Sea** by M. Tasker et al. Nature Conservancy Council, 1987. 336 pp. £2.25 (pb). **Birdwatching in southern Spain** by A. Paterson. Golf Area, S.A., 1987. 157 pp. £6.90 (pb). **Invernada de aves en la Península Ibérica** edited by J. Tellería. Sociedad Española de Ornitología, 1988. 208 pp. **Birds in Mallorca** by J. Busby. Christopher Helm, 1988. 120 pp. £16.95 (hb). **Atlante degli uccelli delle Alpi Italiane** by P. Brichetti. Editoriale Ramperto, 1987. 209 pp. **Atlas of breeding birds in Luxembourg** compiled by E. Melchior et al. Ligue Luxembourgeoise pour la Protection de la Nature et des Oiseaux, 1987. 336 pp. F10.50 (pb).



Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*.

**The natural history of lakes** by M. Burgis and P. Morris. Cambridge University Press, 1987. 218 pp. £17.50 (hb). **The purpose of forests** by J. Westoby. Basil Blackwell, 1987. 343 pp. £35 (hb). **The forest for the trees? Government policies and the misuse of forest resources** by R. Repetto. World Resources Institute, 1988. 120 pp. \$10 (pb). **The new environmental age** by M. Nicholson. Cambridge University Press, 1987. 232 pp. £15 (hb), £9.95 (pb). **The bird of time: the science and politics of nature conservation** by N. W. Moore. Cambridge University Press, 1987. 290 pp. £9.95 (pb). **Ecological imperialism** by A. Crosby. Cambridge University Press, 1986. 382 pp. £30 (hb), £10.95 (pb). **The Gaia peace atlas** edited by F. Barnaby. Pan Books, 1988. 271 pp. £10.95 (pb). **Down to earth: speeches and writings of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh**. Collins, 1988. 240 pp. £12.95 (hb). **A future for our countryside** by J. Blunden and N. Curry. Basil Blackwell, 1988. 224 pp. £9.95 (pb). **The cultural landscape: past, present and future** edited by H. Birks et al. Cambridge University Press, 1989. 521 pp. £37.50 (hb). **Bankrolling successes: a portfolio of sustainable development projects** by W. Reid et al. Environmental Policy Institute and National Wildlife Federation, Washington, 1988. 48 pp. **Environmental ethics**, vol. II edited by R. Bradley and S. Duguid. Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada, 1989. 215 pp. **Livre rouge des espèces menacées en France. Tome 2: espèces marines et littorales menacées** edited by F. de Beaufort. Secrétariat de la faune et de la flore, Mus. Nat. d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, 1987. 356 pp. **The plant book: a portable dictionary of the higher plants** by D. J. Mabberley. Cambridge University Press, 1987. 706 pp. £20 (hb). **World checklist of threatened amphibians and reptiles** compiled by B. Groombridge. Nature Conservancy Council, 1988. 138 pp. £16 (pb). **Checklist of fish and invertebrates listed in the CITES appendices** compiled by P. Almada-Villela. Nature Conservancy Council, 1988. 82 pp. £11 (pb). **Locust handbook** edited by A. Steedman. Overseas Development Natural Resources Institute, London, 1988. 180 pp. £24 (pb). **International code of zoological nomenclature** edited by W. D. L. Ride et al. Natural History Museum Publications, London, 1985. 338 pp. £17.50 (hb).

Courtesy:

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